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Quake Worsens Mexicans' Misery

The tragedy in Mexico City could have repercussions that, like another monstrous earthquake, could rock the United States.

The disaster adds terrible new pressure upon Mexico's wretched masses to burst across the U.S. border in search of a better life.

Even before the earthquake brought new misery to millions of Mexicans, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) warned that Mexico is a tinderbox, and a spark could send desperate refugees overrunning the border.

In the words of one warning, Mexico will be "the No. 1 security problem for the United States in the next 10 years."

With this in mind, the DIA has made a secret study of how many Army divisions it would take to seal off the 1,933-mile Mexican-American border.

While the Reagan administration wants to keep illegal Mexicans out, the administration of Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid, ironically, is worried that the United States wants to take more Mexicans in.

U.S. intelligence intercepted a private conversation last year between de la Madrid and two of his cabinet ministers in Mexico City.

One of the ministers, according to a top-secret report, suggested that restive northern states might secede from Mexico and join the United States.

This incredible idea was accepted by de la Madrid, who said the United States would certainly welcome the annexation of the breakaway Mexican states.

Divorced from reality as this may seem to Americans, it is a measure of the paranoia among Mexican leaders.

In the back rooms of Washington, meanwhile, U.S. strategists acknowledge that they won't be able to slam down an iron curtain between the United States and Mexico.

A secret State Department report puts it this way: "The problems of illegal immigrants, narcotics and social inequality are forces of [great] magnitude. These problems will be important to us; Mexican and American societies are becoming interwoven to the point of symbiosis."

Here are just a few of the pressures, now aggravated by the earthquake, that could cause a massive rupture in the Mexican-American border:

- One-third of all Mexicans today are undernourished. They not only live in poverty but also their living conditions are getting worse.
- The upper half of the population hogs 90 percent of the income, leaving the lower half with less and less.

- The Mexican government is on the brink of bankruptcy. It is saddled with a staggering \$90 billion in foreign debt, with no credit left to satisfy the demands of a booming population.

- The government is corrupt from top to bottom, with 2 million bureaucrats feeding like leeches off the national income. In past columns, I have detailed how Mexican presidents have siphoned off personal fortunes into U.S. and Swiss banks.

Three months ago, we wrote that "it's five minutes to midnight in Mexico." The minute hand, unhappily, is still moving relentlessly.